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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the degree of communicative competence of 8-year-old (n=45) students in five Welsh language immersion programs or Welsh-medium schools, comparing the children's skills with those of 10 native Welsh-speaking children. All were asked to retell a story show previously on video, and to participate in a group discussion task. In addition, they were asked to write the story in their own words. Specific aspects were analyzed within four main areas of competence subscribed in communicative competence: grammatical (especially use of gender); sociolinguistic (appropriate use of formal and familiar terms of address for second person singular); discourse (cohesion); and strategic (communication strategies used in retelling the story and in group discourse). Patterns of usage and comparisons with native-speaking peers are summarized. Results suggests that the immersion students' grammatical and sociolinguistic competence were weaker than their discourse and strategic competence. Contains 26 references. (MSE)

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"Assessment of Communicative Competence of Children in Welsh Immersion Programmes"

Objectives

This paper reports on an evaluation carried out into the effectiveness of immersion programmes to ensure successful second language acquisition. I'll be selecting relevant results from the study which forms part of my PhD thesis.

Theoretical Framework

In recent years, some doubt has been expressed regarding the effectiveness of immersion programmes to ensure successful second language development or, more specifically, to develop the linguistic competence of the pupils, (Hammerly, 1987, 1991). It is suggested that such doubts are raised due to the narrowness of such researchers' definition of language proficiency, (Allen *et al*, 1988).

The emphasis on developing sound communicative skills in the second language has always been a central goal of immersion programmes. Consistent with this goal, Day and Shapson, (1987) developed an instrument to assess the communicative skills of immersion students. This paper will report on the linguistic data collected by means of this instrument in a different sociolinguistic setting, i.e. in Wales.

Methodology

The communicative competence of 45 8 year old English-speaking pupils attending 5 Welsh immersion programmes, (or what we call Welsh medium schools), in South-East Wales was assessed. (10 Welsh (L1) pupils were used for comparison). They were asked to retell a story previously shown on video and to partake in a group discussion task following Day and Shapson, (1987). In addition, they were asked to write the story in their own words. The data were analyzed using Canale and Swain's (1980) communicative competence framework comprising of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences.

Results

We will look at some of the results under the headings of these 4 main components of the communicative competence framework. So we will look at some aspects of the pupils':-

1. Grammatical competence;
2. Sociolinguistic competence;
3. Discourse competence;
4. Strategic competence.

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1. Grammatical competence

This is defined as including:-

> "knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology." (Canale and Swain, 1980:29)

In my thesis, I look at the pupils' phonology, grammar and vocabulary. Here, we are only going to concentrate on grammar. Will look at:-

i. aspects of the grammatical category gender

It is a well-known fact that native English speakers learning French have difficulty mastering the grammatical category gender, (Harley, 1979). The same is also true for English-speakers learning Welsh. Indeed, many researchers who have looked at the second language competence of children in Immersion Programmes (henceforth IPs) have concluded that errors to do with gender are a feature of their second language productions, in Canada, (e.g. Lambert a Tucker, 1972; Spilka, 1976; Harley, 1984; Day a Shapson, 1987) and in Wales (e.g. in various HMI reports, (1984; 1989); Evans, 1986; Powell, 1987; Jones, Powell and Thomas, 1991; Powell, 1988; Jones and Jones, 1984).

Indeed, Hardison (1992) has emphasised that the grammatical category gender is one of the most difficult and frustrating tasks for the learner when attempting to master a second language.

We will concentrate here on one aspect of the grammatical category gender in Welsh, specifically, the feature of:-

> *mutating feminine singular nouns after the definite article*

In Welsh, the initial consonant of a word beginning with various letters mutates if it is a feminine singular noun and follows the definite article. To give an example:

E.g.:-

feminine singular nouns beginning with:-

		p,			b
		t,			d
		c,			g
definite article	+	**b,**	mutates	>	f
		d,			dd
		m			f
feminine singular noun:-		**m**erch	*(girl)*		y **f**erch
masculine singular noun:-		**b**achgen	*(boy)*		y **b**achgen

Therefore, using the correct mutated form in a feminine singular noun following the definite article shows knowledge of the grammatical category gender.

We looked at this and counted up instances of the following 4 things:-

i. correct masculine, (i.e. not mutating masculine forms following the definite article);
ii. incorrect masculine (i.e. mutating a masculine noun following the definite article);
iii. correct feminine (i.e. mutating a feminine noun following a definite article);
iv. incorrect feminine (i.e. not mutating a feminine noun following the definite article).

We can show the results on the following table:-

Table 1: Percentage of correct mutations following the definite article

	%
correct masculine	98
incorrect masculine	2
correct feminine	44
incorrect feminine	56

Table 1 shows that the pupils have a tendency not to mutate which reflects their preference for choosing the masculine. I.e. this shows a clear tendency to overgeneralise the masculine. Only 2% of the time do they mutate when there is no need for a mutation, but they don't mutate a feminine noun 56% of the time.

This seems to be consistent with other researchers' findings on immersion children's grammar, (e.g. Harley's studies in 1979, 1984) and, as noted in connection with French articles by e.g. Spilka:-

> "Non-native speakers favoured the use of masculine determiners..." (Spilka, 1976:551).

This has also been found to be true for children learning Welsh in Wales. E.g. Jones, (1984) has quoted children choosing the masculine form of the numeral 'three,' (tri) instead of the feminine form (tair) before feminine nouns.

It is surprising, therefore, that there were so many correct instances of mutating feminine nouns correctly after the definite article. After all, they correctly mutated feminine forms 44% of the time, i.e. almost half were correctly mutated.

So we wanted to see, therefore, whether the children were aware of the 'rule' in Welsh which states that 'higher animate beings of male sex are realized as male gender, while feminine beings are realized as feminine in gender' i.e. did they see a correlation between the sex of the person in question and the grammatical category gender, since such a correlation exists in Welsh.

Table 2 shows the results with nouns denoting masculine and feminine beings:-

Table 2: Percentage of correct mutation in nouns denoting masculine and feminine beings

	correct %	incorrect %
feminine beings merch/menyw/dynes/mam *girl/woman/woman/mother*	**62.5**	37.5
masculine beings dyn/bachgen/tad *man/boy/father*	94.4	5.6

Table 2 shows that there is a higher percentage of correct mutations for feminine nouns denoting females than with feminine nouns in general. (Remember that only 44% of feminine nouns in general were assigned feminine gender by the children).

This apparent awareness of the correlation between female sex and feminine gender seems to be consistent with a strategy used also by native French speakers when assigning gender as Harley, (1979:131) has pointed out:-

> "The tendency to equate sex and gender is apparently quite strong among French speakers.."

So we wanted also to compare what the control group, (i.e. the native speakers of Welsh) did when assigning gender. It's interesting to do this since Harley, (1979) has pointed out that native speakers of French do not have much difficulty in assigning grammatical gender.

Table 3 compares the experimental and control groups again when mutating feminine singular nouns in general following the definite article.

Table 3: Percentage of correct mutations by experimental and control groups

	experimental %	control %
correct masculine, (i.e. no mutations)	98	100
correct feminine (i.e. mutating feminine singular nouns)	44	89

Table 3 shows that the experimental groups, when assigning feminine gender by mutating, are less correct than the control group of native speakers. I.e. both groups can assign masculine gender by not mutating almost equally as well, whereas the control group has a better mastery of assigning feminine gender to feminine nouns than the experimental groups.

However, it is interesting to note that the native speakers, when assigning feminine gender, are not correct 100% of the time. This might show that acquisition of the grammatical category gender is developmental and only by increasing the contact with, and exposure to, Welsh native-speaker norms can the Immersion pupils acquire this feature.

This result is also consistent with findings of other research in Wales which looked at control of mutations. Rees, (1993), e.g. has noted that children from non-Welsh-speaking homes receive lower scores on control of mutations than children from Welsh-speaking homes and concludes:-

> "The main effect which reached statistical significance was the effect of home language." (p. 60)

It can be concluded from this that more exposure to native-speaker input would lead to more native-like mastery of the mutation in feminine singular nouns following the definite article.

2. Sociolinguistic competence

Sociolinguistic competence has been defined by Harley et al, (1990:14) as the 'ability to produce and recognize socially appropriate language in context.'

T/V distintion

One feature which reflects sociolinguistic competence in Welsh is the ability to choose between the two 2nd person singular pronouns of address which are 'ti' (corresponding to the French 'tu') and 'chi' (corresponding to 'vous'), henceforth referred to as the T and V forms respectively.

We will look at this feature of sociolinguistic competence because research has shown in the French IPs in Canada that, as

Lyster (1994:266), who summarised some research findings, pointed out:-

> ".. after ten years in an immersion program, students ... continue to use *tu* almost exclusively in formal contexts rather than the more native-like use of *vous*."

In Wales, similar results have been found. Jones, (1984:136) reports answers of all the teachers in one Welsh-medium school who unanimously said that the L2 learners used the less formal T when talking to them. In an ethnographic study caried out by Keane, (1988:82) it's noted that the L2 children use T when addressing the teachers.

In this study, what I did was look at the pronouns of address used when the children were using dialogue to report interaction between the characters in the story. E.g. when they were reporting interaction between Mari, (the main character) and the other children, and when reporting interaction between Mari and her parents.

There were 6 options of which pronoun of address to use when retelling the story and reporting interaction between the characters:-

'T'		'V'	
i.	child to child;	iv.	child to child;
ii.	child to adult;	v.	child to adult;
iii.	adult to child;	vi.	adult to child.

It's important to compare what the L2 children did with what the Welsh native-speakers did in the same situation since, as pointed out by Swain and Lapkin, (1990:45):-

> "In examining the results it must be remembered that what is being considered here is sociolinguistic behavior. Such a concept cannot be considered in an absolute sense, but must be considered relative to native speakers of the language. That is to say, when it comes to judging sociolinguistic performance, second language learners' performance has to be based on a comparison of what native speakers of the same age do with the language in the same situation."

So we will look at the pronouns of address used by both groups. Table 4 shows the percentage of the 6 possibilities used by the two groups.

Table 4: Percentage of the 6 possibilities by the two groups

	experimental	control
T child to child	36.4	26.5
T child to adult	3.1	0
T adult to child	60.5	73.5
V child to child	35	33.3
V child to adult	0	33.3
V adult to child	65	33.3

What is most interesting here is the differences between the pronouns of address used by the two groups when the children report a child talking to an adult, (columns 2 and 5). As can be seen, there are no instances by the control group of a child using T when talking to an adult (column 2) and there are no instances by the experimental groups of a child using V to an adult although the native speakers use V when quoting a child talking to an adult 33.3% of the time, (column 5).

This seems to be consistent with some other findings on second language productions by Immersion pupils, (as noted in Lyster's quotation above, see also Harley, 1984:59) that they show a preference for the T form.

On the other hand, the experimental groups did choose the V form when quoting an adult speaking to a child, (column 6).

These differences between the two groups on this test of sociolinguistic competence seems to suggest that the differences are due to lack of exposure to child-adult interaction through the medium of Welsh - which is to be expected since the experimental group don't speak Welsh with their parents whereas the control group do. This might explain therefore the fact that not one of the experimental group children used the V form when quoting a child speaking to an adult, (column 5) and why there were no instances of the T form by the control group when quoting a child talking to an adult, (column 2).

These scores however do not reflect the fact that the children made inconsistent use of these two pronouns of address. At times, they would use the T form and at other times would use the V form when reporting interaction between the same 2 characters. E.g. at times a child would report Mari talking to her father using T and then seconds later would use V.

This seems to supprt the conclusion of Jones' (1988) study which showed that the L2 children did not have any clear norms. He suggests that this might be due to the fact that English - their L1 - does not have this choice between pronouns of address and so the choice between the two forms is complex because of this:-

> "The extensive var [it depends] responses could therefore reflect the perplexity and possibly the redundancy, the choice offers these L2 speakers." (G. E. Jones, 1988:237)

He also argues that the sociolinguistic context of IP is not conducive to acquiring the difference between the two forms of address, as he says:-G. E. Jones, (1988:237):-

> "As regards the circumstances and the context in which these L2 children are acquiring Welsh, this is no doubt a major factor influencing their competence in Welsh... the L2 children's contact with Welsh is severely circumscribed: they lack Welsh-speaking kin, have limited membership of a Welsh-language institution such as the chapel and they live in a highly anglicized society..."

In a similar vein, Romaine (1995:214) has emphasized the importance of the community when acquiring aspects of sociolinguistic competence:-

> "Those aspects of language structure which are more specifically determined by or related to aspects of social structure will obviously be affected by exposure to the social contexts in which input for these features is present in sufficient amounts to trigger acquisition. One area in which this can clearly be seen is the acquisition of the so-called T/V distinction."

We can conclude that it is not surprising that the L2 children's use of the pronouns of address differs form that of the native-speakers in this respect, therefore, since the exposure these children have to Welsh outside the classroom is arguably minimal.

3. Discourse competence

Harley et al, (1990:13) define discourse competence as 'the ability to produce and understand coherent and cohesive text.' A distinction has been made by Halliday and Hasan between coherence and cohesion in that (in Scarcella, Andersen a Krashen, 1990):-

> "...*cohesion* .. refer[s] to the linguistic features that relate sentences to one another. Such features include reference items such as 'he' and 'she,' and conjunctives such as 'first,' 'second' and 'third.' A coherent text is appropriate with respect to ... situational features... " (Scarcella, Andersen a Krashen, 1990:xiii)

In so far as assessing the second language of learners is concerned, Canale, (1984:116) has stated that discourse competence refers to:-

> "[the] extent to which utterances function together to form a unified (spoken or written) text. Attention is paid to both cohesion in form (i.e. use of transition words such as then, however; use of pronouns and synonyms; and repetition of key words and sentence patterns) and coherence in thought (i.e. development of ideas, organization and

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consistency of viewpoint."

In the data collected for this study, it was seen that the children used many devices to ensure cohesion in form, especially.

For example almost all the children started their spoken and written texts of retelling the story with the common narrative device:- 'One day,' or 'once upon a time.' It was intersting to note that this wording was not used on the originial version of the story on the video so we can conclude that this was a convention with which they were very familiar. Some also began their stories with words such as 'in the beginning' and 'first of all.'

They also used several connective features when developing the narrative. According to Perera, (1984:83), some of the devices to ensure a cohesive text include, as she says, 'time and place relaters.'

Indeed, there were many examples of the children using adverbial phrases to do with time in order to ensure an organized text, e.g. (and I translate them from the original Welsh):-

dipyn bach yn hwyrach
a little-bit later
cyn bod y car wedi yrru i ffwrdd odd y dad Mari wedi dweud...
before the car had driven away, Mari's father said
y funud yna
that second
cyn bod hir roedd Mari wedi cyrraedd y top
before long, Mari had reached the top
ar ôl cyrraedd y top
after arriving at the top
y prynhawn yna
that afternoon
diwrnod nesaf
next day
Ar y funed hona fe cwmpodd Mari
At that minute, Mari fell

In addition, there were many examples of 'place relaters' or adverbial phrases to do with location, e.g.

ar y ffordd gwelodd nhw Rhodri
On the way, they saw Rhodri
yn un o'r gangennau oedd y cath fach
In one of the branches, was the little cat
ar y ffordd i'r parc
On the way to the park
ar ei fordd lawr, reodd hi wedi cwmpo
On her way down, she fell
ar y ffordd i lawr
On the way down
ar ei forth i'r parc roedd Rhodri yn edrych lan y coeden
On the way to the park, Rhodri was looking up at the tree

This shows that they made use of connective features to create cohesive texts. They also used sentence connectives for the same purpose. Again, according to Halliday and Hasan (1976 in Perera, 1984:86), sentence connectives can be categorized into four groups, based on semantic grounds. Indeed these four groups correspond to the connectives that appeared in the data:-

i. 'additive connectives' - e.g. use of 'and' to connect main clauses

e.g:-

odd stori am Mari merch fach o'r enw Mari ac odd hi'n hoffi dringo coed
the story was about Mari a little girl named Mari and she liked climbing trees

ii. 'adversative connectives' - e.g.use of 'but' to show that a contrasting idea is about to be presented

e.g.:-

ac oedd Sion wedi trio ond oedd e ddim yn gallu cal y cath
and Sion tried but he couldn't get the cat

iii. 'causal connectives' - e.g. use of 'so' and 'therefore' to highlight the link between cause and effect

e.g.:-

felly roedd gyd o nhw yn cael go
so they all had a go

iv. e.g. 'temporal connectives' - e.g. use of 'then' to order events in sequence.

Indeed 'then' was used very often by some as the only means of establishing the order of events - in one text it was used 25 times!

e.g.:-

roedd ym Sion yn gweud o ti'n mynd i cwmpo a wedyn roedd hi wedi edrych lawr a wedyn.reodd hi wedi cwmpo a wedyn roedd yn nad wedi gweld hi a wedyn roedd e wedi dod mas a gweud ydy ti'n o reit a wedyn roedd i'n gweud dwy'n iawn a wedyn roedd i wedi gweud...
Sion was saying oh you're going to fall and then she looked down and then she fell and then her father had seen her and then he came out and said are you all right and then she said I'm fine and then she said..

This use of 'then' is not surprising as Perera, (1984:245) has pointed out that, apart from 'and', temporal connectives are used the most often and that, indeed, 'then' may be overused.

There were also some examples of using devices to close the story but they were not as common as using devices to introduce the story, e.g.:-

ar y diwedd
at the end
dyna diwedd
that's the end

This brief summary of some of the devices used to create cohesive texts by the pupils shows that they have a high level of discourse competence. This is consistent with the results of other studies on French IP pupils' discourse competence, e.g. Harley, (1984:59) pointed out that the discourse competence of the immersion pupils was just as high as native-speakers.

4. Strategic competence

According to Canale and Swain, (1980:30), strategic competence is:-

> "made up of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence."

In order to categorise the strategies used by the pupils in my study, I created a typology of communication strategies adapted from Poulisse et al, (1984). It included:-

1. reduction strategies (i.e. avoidance, topic abandonment and meaning replacement);

2. L1-based compensatory strategies, (e.g. borrowing, (i.e. the use of a native language word or phrase with native language pronunciation), literal translation and foreignizing (i.e. the use of a native language word or phrase with L2 pronunciation)) and

3. L2-based compensatory strategies, (e.g. approximation; paraphrase, word coinage, description, restructuring, appealing for assistance either directly or indirectly).

Results:-

I compared the communication strategies used in the individual task of retelling the story and in the group discussion task. The differences accoring to task (Individual and group task) are interesting, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Strategies used in individual and group task

	Individual	Group
Reduction Strategies	8.6	2.5
L1-based CPs	32.9	72
L2-based CPs	58.6	25.7

As can be seen, there are more L2-based CPs in the individual task, (i.e. they tried conveying the intended meaning by relying on their L2 - Welsh) but more L1-based CPs in the group task, (i.e. English was used to a greater extent when discussing with their peers and when more features of an authentic communicative setting, (like time-limitations) were present. I.e. they were so enthusistaic and keen to convey their thoughts and opinions, they relied more heavily on their L1 when they had difficulty conveying that intended meaning.

However, these conclusions show that they were able to convey their intended meaning by using the resources available to them in both languages, despite some linguistic shortcomings. This finding supports findings by e.g. Harley, (1984:59) on children in French IP, as she says:-

> "... immersion students quickly develop strategies that enable them to compensate for gaps in their knowledge of French."

Conclusions

These results seem to indicate that the grammatical and sociolinguistic aspects of their communicative competence are weaker than their discourse and strategic competences. These results are consistent with the findings of other evaluations of second language acquisition in immersion programmes, (e.g. Lambert and Tucker, 1972; Harley, 1984; Pawley, 1985; Day and Shapson, 1987, 1991; Genesee, 1987).

This first ever in-depth description of the communicative competence of pupils in Welsh immerison programmes can aid in the development of functional-analytic materials to improve aspects of their sociolinguistic and grammatical competences as, e.g. (Harley, 1989; Lyster, 1990, 1994) have attempted to investigate.

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